

*Chiyoda* participating  
in Pacific Reach '00.



U.S. Navy (Terry Cosgrove)

# Jointness in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces

By FUMIO OTA

**P**rior to World War II the Japanese imperial army and navy lived a cat-and-dog existence. They individually reported to the emperor and there was no organization to coordinate their efforts. Their perceived threats and strategies were also different. The army had traditionally looked north toward Russia while the navy focused on America, especially after the Russo-Japanese War. Both services maneuvered for larger shares of the budget. Even

war did not bring them closer together. The navy never informed the army of its crushing defeat at Midway, and the army was preparing to build its own submarines by the end of the war because it did not trust the navy.

After the conflict Japan drew from experience and established the self defense force (SDF). The National Defense Academy, established in 1953, adopted a joint education system. The joint staff council coordinated ground, maritime, and air staff offices. Joint training included command post exercises, maritime transportation of ground forces, and maritime and air exercises. A central procurement office managed acquisition for ground, maritime, and air self defense forces.

Not all the lessons of the interwar period and World War II were thoroughly learned. Joint-

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**USS Kitty Hawk**  
in South China Sea.



U.S. Navy (Alex C. Witte)



U.S. Navy (Justin Proulx)

**U.S. and Japanese  
sailors aboard  
USS Kitty Hawk.**

ness among the services was not fully developed. Threat perceptions and strategies still differed. The ground self defense force (GSDF) continued to primarily look north, while the maritime self defense force (MSDF) tended to focus on sea lines of communication, extending southeast and

southwest from Japan. Each service built its own communication system, target symbols, and message formats. As a result, they could not communicate among themselves on common secure voice devices. The air self defense force (ASDF) did not share any early warning information from E2Cs, originally a U.S. Navy aircraft, with MSDF ships afloat. The ASDF data link system was incompatible with the MSDF data link 11. The services literally had their own languages; for example, coastal areas were the *beach* to GSDF and the *surf* to MSDF.

Recent efforts to improve jointness in the Japanese self defense forces offer an opportunity to look ahead and identify ways that these initiatives can contribute to combined operations.

### **Renewal of Purpose**

Jointness problems are being resolved for several reasons. First, Japan's security partner, the United States, has stressed integrated operations since passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. Because each service maintains high levels of interoperability with its American counterpart, especially MSDF, many joint assets such as a tactical command and control system and message text format have been introduced. Consequently,



3d Marine Division, Combat Camera (Jason D. Ingersoll)

**Marines and Japanese soldier during Forest Light.**

every service exchanges messages using a common format. Both MSDF Aegis destroyers and ASDF airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft are equipped with the U.S. joint tactical data link system, allowing the services to establish data communication with each other. If Japan deploys ballistic missile defense, which is

### **because of constitutional constraints, SDF has no experience in overseas operational deployments**

currently under study, jointness among the SDF services will advance further in terms of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance because such defenses will require integrating AWACS aircraft, Aegis platforms, Patriot missiles, and other assets.

Second, the services have begun to tackle similar issues, which was not always the case during the Cold War. The new defense guidelines adopted by Japan and the United States also have led to a common perception by all the services of potential threats to the region.

Third, the legal basis for jointness within SDF has improved. The joint staff now has more authority and responsibility. For example, amendments to the defense agency establishment law, enacted in March 1999, have resulted in improvements in coordination of SDF components when the need arises for integrated operations in response to a crisis such as large-scale disasters.

Fourth, joint operations have gradually increased. Because of constitutional constraints, SDF has no experience in overseas operational deployments. Since the Cold War, however, Japan has participated in several peace operations. For

example, during operations in Cambodia in 1992 GSDF civil engineers, MSDF transport and supply ships, and ASDF C-130s deployed together. All the services also contributed in Mozambique in 1993, Rwanda in 1994, and the Golan Heights from 1996 to the present. Domestically, SDF has conducted many natural disaster relief operations jointly, including the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake and the Mount Unzen and Mount Usu volcanoes. The first field training involving each service in Japanese-U.S. joint and combined exercises was held on Iojima and adjacent areas in 1998. It covered varied multiservice operations including landings and aerial descents. MSDF destroyers joined ASDF in providing air cover while GSDF patrolled the coastline along the Sea of Japan. The exercise built on joint exercises over the last 15 years, and many valuable lessons have been learned and implemented. Moreover, joint doctrine has existed since 1968 and is continuously under review and revision.

Fifth, the benefits of joint professional military education are becoming apparent. It began for senior officers in the early 1950s. The National Institute for Defense Studies, an organization of equivalent standing to the National Defense University in Washington, has educated both military and civilian students from other agencies since 1953. The Joint Staff College was opened in 1961 for graduates of the Japan Defense University, who are now key players in their services and on the joint staff council with the retirement of officers with exclusive army or navy backgrounds.

### **Future Challenges**

Despite major advances in jointness, unresolved issues remain. The Japanese coast guard, with 517 ships and 70 aircraft, is not integrated into the armed forces. Although the Coast Guard in the United States maintains a close relationship with the Navy, there is no compatibility between counterparts in Japan. Disparities involve communication equipment, weapons, ammunition, and training. But this stovepipe situation is changing. The two services recently began to conduct joint exercises. The MSDF destroyer *Amagiri* participated in a review of coast guard ships for the first time in April 2000.

Another issue is combined operations. Japan and the United States have been conducting exercises since their alliance began. Each service normally conducts various exercises with their opposite number. But a single service rarely trains with multiple services from another country. Combined cross-service exercises must be developed.

Japanese helicopter landing on *USS Blue Ridge*.



U.S. Navy (Kurt Eshen)



Combined memorial ceremony, Iwo Jima.

For instance, GSDF and its American counterparts, the Army and Marine Corps, have collaborated since the 1980s. MSDF has drilled with the Navy since the 1950s. ASDF has held combined exercises with the Air Force since the 1970s. But MSDF did not exercise with the Air Force except for large-scale joint and combined workouts until 1995. In that year an MSDF escort division conducted a cross-service drill with U.S. aircraft from 35<sup>th</sup> Operational Group on two occasions. MSDF exercised antiair warfare and air control while the Air

Force conducted ship attacks. Japanese participants gained significant experience and Americans had a unique opportunity to sharpen cross-service skills.

Combined exercises resulted from a friendship between the commanders of 35<sup>th</sup> Operations Group and the MSDF escort division that had begun when they were members of the same seminar at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in early 1990s. That bond has opened the door for future training opportunities and illustrates the value of international military educational programs. But the experience also indicates that exercises are too important to be left to personal relationships. They must be an integral part of a bilateral program.

U.S. Marine Corps (John A. Giles)

## The International Dimension

Combined exercises benefit both Japan and the United States. For MSDF, it is a chance to hold simultaneous omnidirectional/multi-threat, anti-air warfare exercises in an electronic warfare environment with experienced U.S. pilots. In addition, such events offer opportunities to improve interoperability in communication and information exchange. For the U.S. military, interoperability is key to cementing relationships with allies and friends. Training is important to creating trust and confidence. This is strong evidence that more joint and combined training is needed.

Combined operations have been the subject of conferences and publications in recent years. At a gathering on "Military Coalitions and the United Nations: Implications for the U.S. Military" held at the National Defense University in 1993, Admiral Paul David Miller, then Commander in Chief, Atlantic Command, spoke about a revolution in defense multinationalism and suggested that teamwork, interoperability, and functional connectivity were key to operational success. Regional cooperation and constructive interaction have been incorporated in the military canon, for example, in Naval Doctrine Publication 1, *Naval Warfare* (1994): "We must maintain our ability to conduct day-to-day operations with other services and other nations." This emphasizes the importance of teamwork in a joint and multinational environment.

There are many types of combined exercises. The possibilities include antiair warfare with U.S. ships and Japanese fighters, mine warfare involving American aircraft and Japanese forces, and U.S. naval gunfire support for Japanese troops. Other Asian allies could adopt the U.S.-SDF experience as a training model. There may also be applications for such efforts in Europe, where there are no policies on combined cross-service training. NATO has combined exercises where all services are involved and transnational service exercises among the same service components.

Many countries have undergone arms reductions and force drawdowns since the Cold War. Moreover, exercise opportunities have decreased. Consequently, militaries are looking for creative ideas to overcome training shortages and technological shortfalls. Additional transnational threats are emerging; thus forces must respond transnationally as well. Combined joint exercises are part of the solution.

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